

I come from what society now considers a dysfunctional family environment. Perhaps, in an imperfect world all families are that to some degree. From birth until age 5 to me, life was common; however, normal is a highly subjective term. Environment shapes us and we think all is perfectly ordinary until the mirrors of other people and society confirms or disapproves of our misperceptions about who and what one is. What people do to us is rarely personal. In other words, what people say and do *always* is about them *not I*. Everything is a teacher, and when each student is ready for corrective instruction it appears, and only the sage knows when to show up – never a student. Often the best ones are those that teach the harshest lessons and/or correct those we have already learned. A memorable one for me came at work. It was in a vast complex of buildings, which required a massive, IT, department, which included maintaining complicated telephone systems. The IT person assigned to our area did a wonderful job. Nobody knew her name; everyone simply called her ‘Ma Belle.’ Nicknames among employees were commonly accepted; she seemed to enjoy hers. Ma Belle was an affable sort of person in that nothing emotionally stuck to her. I call people like that *Teflon* coated because everything rolls off them without sticking. One day I was feeling small and confrontational looking for an argument to prove something that did not exist except to my undeveloped-ego. Toxic upbringing involved ego-trips like that, among many other coping skills, dealing with bullying and similar threats to a child’s, fragile, self-existence. Today was a self-improvement lesson with Ma Belle as the teacher. She had a job ticket about the desk phone and while working it, my ego took a cheap shot at her. Nothing was personal; Ma Belle simply was a convenient target, more or less, to a misbehaving sense of self. When finished, she responded to my diatribe by chirping, “Maybe,” which ended the confrontation before resuming her task. “Maybe,” that’s all – just “Maybe?!” No defense, no argument, no fight – just ‘Maybe!’ Ego trips are about fighting, defending, losing or winning proving something at someone else’s expense. Little is required to deflate one only a tiny pinprick. Ma Belle held the pin - “Maybe.” Poof – popped my ego! ‘This is a lesson’ echoed a guiding thought from somewhere in the unconscious places of my head – “*Maybe*,” said the mirror holding a telephone before me. You know the children’s story of a vain old crone standing before her vanity mirror asking, “*Mirror, mirror, on the wall who is the loveliest of them all?*” ‘*Not you,*’ replied the mirror. Rumor was that she shattered many of them in never accepting self-truth. Everyone is a phony in some way – *everyone*. Reflections often suffer when a person does not accept them to punishingly smash that which pinpricks her ego. We all do that...BTW. Small children are frail, truthful mirrors and learn to lie when punished for their honesty, so do honest adults. Fragile glass images do not mislead; and when broken they simply shatter into child fragments that remain truthful no matter how small. Not so, with shattered people – defensively they learn to deceive. There was unique sincerity in ‘Maybe,’ which I had to figure out via self-examination. After many years, realization arrived that I needed to seriously fine-tune and replace entire personal *misperceptions* about life and my relationships with others and to me. Therein lies the real work: self-change, which is the only possible transformation by anyone. Perhaps that is why we impossibly try to change others to suit us? Because changing self involves personal pain and very hard work but is doable over the former. Youth believes s/he can revolutionize the world with personal words, works and deeds; or, that it will adjust to fit *our* desires, wants and needs. However, over time life’s many trials test one to discover that only ‘I’ change. Which means growing up and accepting life as an adult instead of as an immature grieving child? Straightforward is it not? However, accomplishing the simplest things in life is *the most* difficult task. William Blake wrote, ‘A fool who persists in his [or her] folly becomes wise.’ Ma Belle mastered that wisdom in just one simple word – ‘Maybe.’